



Rhode Island Emergency Management Advisory Council

Meeting Notice

THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL WILL BE HELD:

January 31, 2006

3:00 PM

The Greenwood Elementary School
93 Sharon St. – Warwick, RI

AGENDA

I. Call to Order/ Attendance

Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts, chair
MG Robert Bray, co-chair
Robert Shapiro, Warwick School Department
Namvar Moghadam, DOT
Michael Dimascolo, State Fire Marshal
Lt. Dave Hayden, RISP
Ray LaBelle, E9-1-1
Michael Mulhearn, DEM
James Lanni, RIDPUC
Lori Needham, RI Broadcasters' Association
Barbara Haynes, RI Broadcasters' Association
Richard Blott, Office of Congressman James Langevin

Matteo Gugliemetti, RIOER
Robert Thorne, TSA
Richard Brown, EP EMA
Geof Milner, RI-SATERN
Chris Laccinole, Vets Affairs
Paul Stasiuk, National Grid
John Holt, RI Red Cross
David Abbott, RIDE
Mayor Scott Avedesian
Tom Walsh, TSA/Rail
Ron Pigeon, USCG

II. Approval of the minutes from December 20, 2006

A motion to approve the minutes with an amendment to include the attendance of John Holt, RI Red Cross at the December 20, 2006 meeting was offered by the lieutenant governor. The motion was seconded by Director Warren. The minutes were amended and approved.

III. Introduction

A. Comments from the Chairman, Lt. Governor Elizabeth H. Roberts

Lt. Governor Roberts welcomed the members of the council and guests in attendance to her first meeting as chairwoman and began with a moment of silence to recognize Dylan Gleavey, the Greenwood Elementary School student who died during the illness incident.

She also thanked members of the council for participating in the ongoing interview research being performed by staff from the Office of the Lieutenant Governor in order to get feedback on the council.

Lt. Governor Roberts introduced her chief of staff Paul Tencher as the lead contact on all emergency management issues, as well as, Vlad Ibarra, who will be conducting the interview process of all members. Lt. Governor Roberts thanked MG Bray and Director Warren for their assistance and service. Lt. Governor Roberts noted that the council is the only group in Rhode Island that can bring such a cross section of experts and experience from around Rhode Island and the region to solve problems related to emergency management in Rhode Island.

According to Lt. Governor Roberts this meeting will analyze the systemic challenges associated with the school illness incident. She said the incident had a serious and immense impact and we, as a state, should learn from it. She commended the participants of the activation for containing the incident and inspiring confidence from the public.

B. Comments from the Vice Chairman, MG Robert Bray

MG Bray gave a quick overview of the 2007 priorities for RIEMA. Top priority is to continue the process of building the communication management system. RIEMA will also make a concerted effort to continue incident training for public officials. Third is a concentration to continue enhancing the federal grant programs. MG Bray said that RIEMA has done a great job in the past applying and receiving grants and he hopes to continue that success.

Another top priority for MG Bray is to expand the EOC and the administrative areas for RIEMA. Recent events, especially the school illness activation, illustrated that the EOC can get overcrowded very quickly. The facility is important for the community, but also for the 24-capability the RIEMA needs in an emergency.

MG Bray also mentioned that RIEMA is doing some maintenance to make the EOC more efficient especially as the need to spend some of the grant money received begins.

IV. School Illness Incident Update- *Mayor Scott Avedisian (Warwick), Rep. Peter Ginaitt, Dr. David Gifford and Dr. Tony Cirillo (Department of Health), Robert Warren (RIEMA), David Abbott, RI Department of Education.*

Mayor Scott Avedisian welcomed members of the council and said he was happy to have Lt. Governor Roberts host her first meeting in Warwick. The Mayor said that the Greenwood incident was a special situation and he was pleased with the response. He said the time period of the incident were interesting days while trying to piece together the problems, but because of the special talents of this group the state and city worked through it.

Lt. Governor Roberts introduced Rep. Peter Ginaitt to speak about the General Assembly resolutions submitted by the representative and Sen. John Revens which would track school illness.

Rep. Ginaitt wanted to say publicly how impressed he was about the interagency cooperation during the incident. He was surprised to learn through this incident how many school absenteeism monitoring systems exist in the state. He felt there was a need to merge the Department of Education and the Department of Health monitoring systems to trigger warnings about illness outbreaks. The resolution would direct DOH to draft a proposal for this action.

The lieutenant governor interjected that she hoped the council could assist in the proposal and that a workgroup could be developed with the council for the proposal.

The lieutenant governor asked Mayor Avedisian to speak about recommendations the city might have for the state moving forward.

Mayor Avedisian said the city started its discovery of the illness at 2030 Tuesday evening, December 26, 2006 and by 1200 Wednesday December 27th DOH, Department of Human Services and RIEMA were in the Mayor's office exploring the situation. The Mayor said during that time the city was able to begin emergency activation, call families, quickly allocate antibiotics and also find out who from the phone system was not contacted or which calls went directly to voice mail. The Mayor thought the system worked very effectively and thanked the state for all of its assistance. The Mayor said the state was able to answer all of the questions municipal officials and the families had, keeping everyone, including the media well informed and calm. The Mayor specifically recognized Dr. Gifford and Secretary Hayward for the time they spent in Warwick.

The Mayor said the only thing that could be improved upon from the city's perspective is the need for a way to reach officials in the chain of command during holidays and weekends. The incident took place over New Year's Eve weekend and communication with city officials was not easy.

The lieutenant governor thanked the Mayor for his attendance and introduced Dr. David Gifford.

Dr. Gifford acknowledged the theme that was constant throughout the incident: teamwork and cooperation. The cooperation between agencies was fostered by funds the state has expended through RIEMA and DOH to put an emergency structure in place for agencies and to follow the format.

Dr. Gifford said that the issues with communications Mayor Avedisian raised need to be addressed and it is an area where RIEMA and other agencies can improve.

Other areas where the state can be more prepared for emergency situations according to Dr. Gifford are:

- Drilling for emergency situations. The state should be pushing the NIMS training across all levels of government. The individuals involved in this incident that were not emergency personnel picked up on the ICS but it took more time to get them acquainted.

-This incident involved a large number of personnel and the EOC was at or beyond capacity. If a Katrina-size disaster occurred, the EOC would not have the space to fit the personnel needed.

-Communication between primary care physicians need to improve. Faxing advisories to medical offices on the weekend does not make any sense.

Dr. Gifford noted some things that went well:

-The vests worn by personnel in the EOC may seem uncomfortable, but it is a small part of ICS that makes a real difference. Anyone coming into that situation would know what each member of the team is responsible for.

-Like Rep. Ginaitt mentioned, this incident got the hand gels into schools and a closer look at monitoring systems will begin. Already, DOH has found two cases of illness outbreak, including a stomach virus outbreak and an outbreak of strep throat. Tracking will be a major lesson that DOH will be working on.

Dr. Gifford introduced Dr. Tony Cirillo, director of DOH's Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response:

Dr. Cirillo echoed Dr. Gifford and said that this emergency was truly a public health emergency that the state managed. Many people went above and beyond the call of their responsibilities including Leo Messier. The incident also was an opportunity to teach people about ICS procedures. Dr. Cirillo wanted to thank Alysia Mihalakos for her work on the logistics of allocating antibiotics within a 24-hour period like Mayor Avedisian noted. Dr. Cirillo was grateful for all of those involved including Superintendent Shapiro and Principal Hunter. He also thanked West Warwick and Coventry officials and said the CDC was an important resource. The data from the CDC will be used to help Rhode Islanders in the future.

The lieutenant governor introduced RIEMA Director Warren:

When officials learned of more incidents of illness on the Wednesday, Director Warren, MG Bray and Director Gifford asked for an activation of the EOC in order to make response efforts more disciplined. Director Warren called in the staff of the RIEMA at 4 a.m. and the EOC was operational at 6 a.m. Director Warren said this incident showed how quickly they can stand up in response.

Director Warren thanked the Cranston Fire Chief for his planning assistance.

Director Warren also noted his report to FEMA Region 1 on the incident. The regional office was very impressed with the handling of the incident. They could not believe the cooperation of RIEMA with DOH, including the unified status of the agencies. FEMA Region 1 will rewrite the pandemic flu plan because of the review of this incident.

The lieutenant governor introduced David Abbott from the Department of Education (RIDE):

Mr. Abbott said he was in the EOC for most of the activation and the ICS procedures were new to all the personnel assisting from RIDE, including the vests. Mr. Abbott noted that outreach to particular players in government about emergency training would be good.

Mr. Abbott wanted to focus his comments on communications issues. Only Warwick has a flash calling system. Schools have better access to parents, but it is a problem that some school district have better access to parents than other school districts.

Lt. Governor Roberts asked how the EOC interacted with parochial, private and daycare facilities.

Mr. Abbott said that most private schools and a majority of public schools have phone trees. Warwick should be the model for a communication system. It is part of the conversation RIDE wants to have.

The lieutenant governor commented that the Warwick flash system should be part of the discussion of the monitoring system.

Mr. Abbott said that whether the flash system was part of the General Assembly resolution or not it will be part of the discussion.

The lieutenant governor said staff from her office was at the EOC to monitor the situation and assist throughout the incident. She was impressed by the sense of calm that the governor, MG Bray and Dr. Gifford showed throughout the incident and at the press conference.

Lieutenant Gov. Roberts introduced MG Bray:

MG Bray wanted to emphasize a couple of points on the incident. Most importantly, the incident is a building block. One of the lessons learned was the importance of continuity of operations plans. DOH had done the training and had continuity plans in place. Because of this planning and training, transition from daily operations at DOH to emergency operations went very well. DOH could reach within itself and not disrupt daily operations. MG Bray hoped all members of the EMAC would take that lesson back to its agencies.

MG Bray again stressed the incident was contained to Kent County and if this was a statewide emergency, the EOC would be overpowered.

Other lessons MG Bray mentioned:

- The need to train. The need for training never ends. Staff transitions frequently so there is a need to continually update in the NIMS and ICS standards. When agency personnel from outside RIEMA come to an incident, we do not have the time to train.

- Public affairs. MG Bray wanted to compliment the team for being patient. This incident was especially sensitive because children, families and the national media were involved. This was an event with public policy consensus. Getting the message correct was important for ensuring calm.

-MG Bray also thanked the CDC for their work behind the scenes.

The lieutenant governor said that she was happy about the interagency cooperation but asked Dr. Gifford about the inclusion of the private sector.

Dr. Gifford said United Healthcare called many times to offer assistance, but that the incident was moving so quickly, the unified command did not have time to figure out the ways to bring them into the process.

The lieutenant governor offered the EMAC to create a working group to work through the challenges of integrating the private sector into emergency situations.

Mr. Andrew Dzykewicz asked if RIEMA offered training sessions to agencies.

Director Warren responded that the construction at the EOC has curtailed some of the program, but the training will begin soon now that the construction is over.

MG Bray added that you can self-instruct with NIMS training level 1 on the internet. RIEMA will do the training to get staff from the elementary training to a more executive level.

V. Homeland Security Report - *MG Robert Bray*

MG Bray said he was looking forward to the hurricane exercise because it would be a big training opportunity. Rhode Island will take a national role in this exercise.

On the Rhode Island National Guard, MG Bray spoke of some concern of the Defense Reauthorization Act that passed Congress and has allowed President Bush to override governors and adjutant generals in order to mobilize troops in certain situations. MG Bray is working with the congressional delegation to revert back to a situation that worked well.

MG Bray said there is an equipment shortage in the Rhode Island National Guard. The National Guard throughout the country will be receiving \$25 billion to refit units due to the war on terror. RI wants its fair share, but it will take a few years to rebuild. These shortages do affect RIEMA, but the shortages are mitigated. Despite the mitigation, the shortages have not had an impact on RIEMA's ability to respond in emergency situations.

MG Bray also gave an update on the Air Guard's move to upgrade some of its aircraft. The aircrafts they are upgrading would be able to do more for RIEMA due to new capacities to fly over water.

VI. Domestic Preparedness Subcommittee Report – *Robert Warren, RIEMA*

Director Warren reported that the Domestic Preparedness Subcommittee met on January 23. The Family Assistance plan is being updated and should be approved next month. The plan would set up procedures to give resources to families in the event of a major emergency.

TSA has become heavily involved in the subcommittee. There is less information to report from the subcommittee because it is grant season and members of the RIEMA have been working hard on grant preparation. There are two working groups progressing towards the April 7th deadline.

The RIEMA received an increase in EFPG grants up to \$1.8 million, an increase of \$500,000.

The lieutenant governor asked if there were any local exercises planned. Director Warren reported that there were drills scheduled and he would report to the lieutenant governor the complete schedule, but there is an airport drill in fall 2007, a hospital drill in the spring, and March 7th there is a flooding drill.

VII. Winter Weather Preparation- *Department of Transportation*

Namvar Moghadam from the Department of Transportation stated that Rhode Island has not seen a major winter weather system yet. All 160 trucks are ready should an incident occur. There is enough material on hand to carry the state through 2-4 major storms. The 281 employees in the DOT are ready to serve the RIEMA in any way needed.

Lt. Governor Roberts asked if there were any new forecasts from our weather services. Mr. Moghadam said that the services are still predicting a mild winter due to a strong El Nino year.

VIII. Hurricane Preparation – *Robert Warren, RIEMA*

Director Warren wanted to remind the EMAC that hurricane season begins May 1st and that the RIEMA is actively pursuing public relations tactics to remind the citizens to prepare for the coming season.

April 3rd-May 7th there will be a national hurricane exercise, specifically testing the capabilities of the Rhode Island National Guard. On May 4th, Rhode Island's drill will commence. Director Warren is looking for more funding to keep the EOC active throughout the weekend.

The regional hurricane plan has been approved. The supplies that were situated on Block Island have been moved to a FEMA facility.

RIEMA will be attending a regional hurricane preparation session.

IX. Energy Update – *Matteo Gugliemetti, Office of Energy Resources*

The report on prices was attached to the council agenda. Matteo Gugliemetti from the agency formerly known as the State Energy Office reported that heating assistance grants were on track and that there are clearly enough funds to assist families this year. Mr. Gugliemetti also reported that the State Energy Office was changed by the General Assembly in last year's session to become the Office of Energy Resources. The new director, Mr. Andrew Dzykewicz, was introduced and recommended that what would be more helpful to the council would be a focus on industry trends rather than real-time prices.

X. New Business/ Member Comments and/or Suggestions

Lori Needham of the Rhode Island Broadcasters' Association introduced the new president of the Association, Ms. Barbara Haynes. Dr. Gifford reported that the DOH was working with the RIBA to develop new public service announcements. Ms. Haynes and Lisa Churchville from WJAR 10 are traveling to a broadcasters' convention that will focus on emergency management.

Lt. Governor Roberts asked the RIBA to report back to the EMAC on the information they received. Director Warren noted that he would meet with the participants for a pre-briefing and debriefing.

Brian Pires of the U.S. Attorney's Ant-terrorism Task Force welcomed the new chairwoman and offered any assistance the council may need.

XI. Adjournment

Lt. Governor Roberts mentioned that the next meeting may also be outside of the EOC because of the newly installed sliding doors limit the size of the room.

The chair entertained a motion to adjourn. That motion was seconded by MG Bray.